

Big Business Institutionalised Corruption and Financial Fraud in the European Union

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

Global Research, July 15, 2014

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Law and Justice](#),
[Religion](#)

The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) is a coalition of about 200 civil society groups, trade unions, academics and public affairs firms. It campaigns against the increasing and massive influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe. As Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) prepare to quiz the president-elect of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker on Tuesday 15 July, the coalition is calling on them to ensure that improvements in the areas of ethics, conflicts of interest and lobby transparency are placed high on the agenda of the new Commission.

During the recent EU elections, 177 now-elected MEPs signed ALTER-EU's Politics for People pledge in which they committed to "stand-up for citizens and democracy against the excessive lobbying influence of banks and big business" upon entering office [1]. This pledge should not be taken lightly, not least because the financial industry commands tremendous lobbying resources and enjoys privileged access to decision makers [2].

The financial sector lobbies EU decision-makers by means of over 700 organisations, including companies' public relations offices, business associations and consultancies. This figure outnumbers civil-society organisations and trade unions working on financial issues by a factor of more than five. And the imbalance is even greater when numbers of staff and lobbying expenses are compared. The financial lobby massively outspends other actors by a factor of more than 30 and is also massively over-represented in the EU's official advisory groups that play a key role in helping to shape policy: 15 of 17 expert groups were found to be heavily dominated by the financial industry.

Erik Wesselius of Corporate Europe Observatory and a member of the ALTER-EU steering committee says:

"People across Europe are increasingly concerned about how decisions affecting their daily lives are made by a European Commission that is too close to big business and corporate lobbyists... MEPs can prove their commitment to stand-up for citizens and democracy by asking Mr Juncker probing questions about ethics and transparency and by seeking a real commitment from him to rein in excessive corporate lobbying influence."

The parliamentary hearing of the president-elect presents an opportunity to secure firm commitments from the president of the Commission. Just before the European elections, ALTER-EU published an assessment of the outgoing Barroso II Commission's commitment to transparency and ethics issues entitled [3]. It concluded that the 2009-14 Commission

lacked the political will to significantly improve the lobbying transparency and ethics policy and practice during its time in office.

Corporate Europe Observatory reached a more damning conclusion in its report on the more general record of the European Commission over the same period [4]. It concluded that the Commission had pursued a corporate agenda, with little regard for other interests in society. Moreover, the Commission has fought tooth and nail to avoid effective regulation of lobbyists, including by opposing a mandatory register and avoiding serious reform of its advisory structure, with its so-called expert groups dominated by big business representatives in many areas. The report's ultimate conclusion is that the Commission is a disgrace to democratic traditions in Europe. It is effectively a captive but willing servant of a corporate agenda and moreover is riddled with conflicts of interests, secrecy and non-transparent practices (eg, 5,6,7]

However, ALTER-EU says it has been encouraged by recent statements by president-elect Juncker to the Green/ EFA political group regarding a mandatory lobby register and legislative footprint and believes that the new Commission must embrace an ambitious and pro-active approach, needed to increase public trust [8].

Max Bank of LobbyControl, who is also a member of ALTER-EU's steering committee, says:

"ALTER-EU priority areas for Commission action include: blocking the revolving door for commissioners and Commission staff; taking action to clean up expert groups; and making a genuine commitment to ensuring the work of the Commission, including its contacts with lobby groups, are made fully transparent. We hope that MEPs will take action to firmly place these issues on the agenda of the president-elect of the Commission in order that improvements are made in practice during the next term."

The rising tide of discontent

Public trust appears to be at rock bottom and the Commission must take note.

"Citizens have had enough of a Europe made for high profits and social misery... democracy is not for sale at any price. We demand a Europe from below." Rudy Janssens from Belgian public services trade union CGSP.

"... solidarity beyond borders is necessary and possible... (we need to build) a trans-European movement to fight back against the neo-liberal crisis policies coming out of Brussels. Up until the elections we will be in the streets, demanding the Europe that we really want." Noemi Costa from the Coalizione Centri Sociale and the Blockupy International Coordinating Committee.

"Why are we still letting those who caused the crisis decide how we respond to it? Banks and big business, rather than taking responsibility for wrecking the economy, have passed the cost on to ordinary citizens who have watched as compliant governments demolish public services and people's ability to earn a living. We don't owe so why should we pay? We need an alternative to austerity." Felipe Van Keirsbilck from Belgian trade union CNE

"Rather than looking for solutions to the crisis in the interest of citizens, our so-called political leaders like EU trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht are trying to make big business even richer through secretly negotiated transatlantic trade

deals. And again its citizens and producers who will suffer, with deregulation seeing public services sold off while dangerous foods make their way to a plate near you. Who wants to eat hormone-filled beef or chlorine-washed chicken?"
Luc Hollands from Belgian milk producers cooperative MIG

Notes

[1] More information about ALTER-EU's Politics for People campaign can be found here: <http://www.alter-eu.org/politics-for-people-2014-eu-election-campaign>

[2] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/attachments/financial_lobby_report.pdf

[3] "Talking the talk, but not walking the walk" can be found at: <http://www.alter-eu.org/documents/2014/04>

[4] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/record_captive_commission.pdf

[5] <http://corporateeurope.org/revolvingdoorwatch>

[6] <http://corporateeurope.org/efsa/2013/10/unhappy-meal-european-food-safety-authoritys-independence-problem>

[7] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/us-eu-transatlantic-free-trade-agreement-more-secrecy-and-more-duplicity-revealed/5369272>

[8] See Green /EFA hearing with Jean-Claude Juncker on 09/07/2014: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/other-events/video?event=20140709-0900-SP-ECIAL>

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Colin Todhunter](#), Global Research, 2014

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Colin Todhunter](#)

About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca